DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 420 HE 035 753

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TITLE	Effective Use of Adjunct Professors in Educational Leadership.
PUB DATE	2003-02-00
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (New Orleans, LA, February 21-23, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adjunct Faculty; Educational Administration; Higher Education; *Instructional Leadership; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The limited resources of most colleges and universities and the efforts of most higher education programs, including those in educational leadership, to comply with state and national standards mean that adjunct professors play a vital role in the success of an educational leadership program. This paper offers suggestions for maintaining the quality and success of adjunct professors in an educational leadership program. Tips for success are: (1) match courses taught by adjunct faculty with their areas of expertise; (2) provide services for adjuncts throughout the semester; (3) take care of the "little things"; (4) treat adjuncts as colleagues and not as subordinates; (5) encourage and support the work of adjuncts; and (6) communicate expectations of learner outcomes. (Contains 3 figures and 10 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Running Head: EFFECTIVE USE OF ADJUNCT PROFESSORS

Effective Use of Adjunct Professors in Educational Leadership

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Paper presented for the
American Association of School Administrators Annual Conference
New Orleans, Louisiana
February 21-23, 2003

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Abstract

With the limited resources of most colleges and universities, having sufficient full time faculty to teach every available course is simply not a realistic expectation. At the same time, however, the programs at these universities, including educational leadership programs, are also working diligently to meet state and national standards. Thus, adjunct professors play a vital role in the success of any educational leadership program. This paper offers suggestions for maintaining the quality and success of adjunct professors in an educational leadership program.

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EFFECTIVE USE OF ADJUNCT PROFESSORS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

With the limited resources of most colleges and universities, having sufficient full time faculty to teach every available course is simply not a realistic expectation. In fact, adjuncts now make up almost 50 percent of all professors in higher education (Schneider, 1999). At the same time, however, the programs at these universities, including educational leadership programs, are also working diligently to meet state and national standards. Thus, adjunct professors play a vital role in the success of any educational leadership program (Cox & Leatherman, 2000).

The perception of an adjunct professor is often inaccurate (Smallwood, 2001). Some individuals view adjunct professors as fill-ins, people who are not quite good enough to be full time faculty but at least have the terminal degree to teach a graduate level course. Adjunct faculty offer much more than a degree, however. Most adjuncts are practicing administrators who offer current expertise in a variety of fields (Smallwood, 2001). For example, who better to teach a school finance class than the superintendent of a large school district, a person who is intimately involved with the most current school finance issues every single day? The adjunct professor who teaches the school finance course at our university is much more adept and current with public school finance than any of our full time faculty. He does an outstanding job, and the students love his class. It is one of our most requested classes and receives some of the highest evaluations in our department.

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Effectiveness by the Numbers

The success of adjunct professors can be seen in evaluation data as well. An analysis of one successful department's faculty evaluation scores indicates that the overall faculty evaluation average score is actually higher when the scores of adjunct faculty are included. On this university's faculty evaluation system, the weighted means of all items are available with and without the scores of adjunct faculty. On this system, the mean value of item 20 is a critical component of the faculty evaluation system; item 20 reads: "Overall, compared to other professors I have had at [this university] I would say that this professor: (7) is one of the best professors, (6) is much better than the average professor, (5) is better than the average, (4) is an average professor, (3) is poorer than the average professor, (2) is much poorer than the average professor, (1) is one of the poorest professors." Including adjunct scores, the weighted mean on the faculty evaluation system item for teaching effectiveness measured by this item for the Fall 2000/Spring 2001 academic year indicated a University average of 6.07 (on a 7.0 scale). The teaching effectiveness average for the College of Education and Applied Science was 6.10. The weighted mean for the Department of Educational Leadership was 6.47. Without including adjunct evaluation scores, the University and College means remained the same (6.07 and 6.10, respectively), and the Department weighted mean actually dropped to 6.44. Thus, the teaching effectiveness of adjunct professors is considered by students to be as effective as that of full time faculty. The difference between evaluation scores figured with and without adjunct professors is minimal, with the average actually being higher when adjunct professor scores are included. (Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these data.)

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Techniques for Using Adjuncts Effectively

Using adjunct professors to the benefit of your program is not simple, but neither is it an unmanageable task. A few basic guidelines can help educational leadership preparation programs use their adjunct professors in a way that benefits both student and teacher. These tips, while not costly or overly time consuming, are often overlooked in the busyness of already overworked department chairs and faculty. However, the ultimate success or failure can depend on the effectiveness of a department's adjunct professors; in that case, these tips are simply invaluable.

Tip One: Match courses taught by adjunct faculty with their area of expertise.

As simple as this tip sounds, it is too often ignored by programs who are desperately seeking a person to teach a particular course, at a particular time, in a particular place, at the last minute. The panic to fill this position is understandable, but filling it with a person not qualified or experienced to teach the course content is not. All faculty, but particularly adjunct professors, should clearly have the expertise – both knowledge and experience – to teach the courses to which they are assigned. As mentioned previously, adjunct professors in this way fill a need that even the best full time faculty cannot manage. Adjuncts are the current experts in the field; they are in the trenches and thus maintain the daily, hands-on perspectives that full time faculty may sometimes lose. School finance, in particular, is a primary example of where adjuncts can better fill a course's demands than can full time faculty. Other courses where expert practitioners can excel might include a course on the principalship – who better to teach a course on the principalship than a current practicing principal who excels at what he or she does for a living? Likewise with the superintendency course, curriculum courses, and

courses focusing on special programs. Because these issues change regularly with state and federal legislators, using instructors who are current practicing experts makes good sense. And in a educational world of shrinking budgets, it makes good cents, too.

However, using adjuncts to teach courses for which they are not experts is not only bad practice, it can also be highly detrimental to the success and credibility of your program. Furthermore, adjuncts should be expert teachers, not just experts in their subject area. We all can remember the professor who obviously knew his or her "stuff," but could not teach his way out of a paper bag – please, do not put your educational leadership students through that same experience. Their preparation time to become successful leaders is limited already; the instruction they receive, from adjuncts and from full time faculty, must be of the highest quality. In essence, this tip requires that above all, you choose your adjunct faculty carefully and wisely.

Tip two: Provide services for adjuncts throughout semester.

Adjunct professors often have little knowledge about what services are available to them as faculty members. One of the most important things a department can do for its adjunct faculty is to host a short orientation program to introduce these persons to graduate level teaching and to your university (Kamps, 1996). This is the perfect opportunity for reviewing important pieces of the university handbook and policy manual. Adjunct professors can also be made aware of what technology services are available to them, including whether these services include the use/availability of hardware, software, or technical support. An orientation program should also explain what types of clerical services are available to adjunct faculty. Will the secretaries or student workers be available to type papers, file information, or archive data as needed

for adjunct professors? If so, are these services available under any sort of timeline? Library resources should similarly be covered in an orientation program. All adjunct faculty should receive a tour of the library, along with an explanation of what resources are available on and off campus.

A final important piece of orientation for adjunct faculty is an overview of the entire degree or certification program for which they teach. While adjunct faculty may oftentimes not be designated as an advisor for students on degree options or certification requirements, they should certainly be aware enough of these programs that they can answer basic student questions or at the very least refer students to the appropriate personnel to find the information they need. Adjuncts who are totally removed from what is happening within the department may lose credibility with frustrated students who have unanswered questions. It takes little effort, with a big benefit, to ensure that adjunct professors are familiar with the department's basic degree and certification programs.

In addition, the orientation program can serve as a "getting acquainted" function for adjunct professors. It should be held as a fairly informal affair, with enough structure to adequately cover the topics at issue but enough lightness to make these important faculty members feel comfortable with the full time faculty and the university environment. The orientation offers a non-threatening social setting for adjunct professors to learn important components of their job, as well as meet the people with whom they now directly or indirectly work.

Tip three: Take care of the "little things."

The little things are those minor details that full time faculty may forget that they once did not know; in other words, those things that are such a typical part of full time faculty's working life that little or no effort goes into remembering how they should be done. For persons who are not part of the daily university setting, these little things can turn into big problems. For example, be sure that all adjunct faculty have all the necessary information on student grades and grade entry procedures. Depending how many times these persons have taught for the department, they may or may not be familiar with these procedures. Furthermore, procedures such as grade entry may sometimes change as new policies are adopted, new software installed, or new improvements made. In these circumstances, even the most experienced adjunct faculty may not know the correct way to enter student grades. Timelines for grade entry are also important, and again these types of small details that come to full time faculty in frequent emails or memos may be overlooked for adjuncts.

Providing adjuncts with sample syllabi is another seemingly minor detail that can have a great impact on effectiveness. Sample syllabi serve two important purposes: (1) they ensure that required content for a particular course is covered regardless of who teaches the class, and (2) they offer a model for all faculty to follow to ensure that all syllabi meet minimum expectations or standards. For example, our university has adopted a format for all syllabi to follow for courses involved in the NCATE accreditation procedures. These syllabi include both state and NCATE standards alignment for all course objectives. Adjunct faculty unfamiliar with this syllabus format would never know to include such objectives on their course syllabi. Furthermore, all adjuncts receive a copy of the syllabus for the course that they are teaching; our faculty have spent a great

deal of time and effort in aligning all course curriculum for the educational leadership program, and it is critical that adjunct faculty are aware of this alignment. By providing them with previous syllabi for the course they are teaching, we know that the adjunct professor has knowledge of what curricular offerings the course is expected to have. Thus, providing sample syllabi for adjuncts is another simple but highly beneficial practice.

Other seemingly minor items that should not be forgotten when working with adjuncts include making them aware of all evaluation procedures. They need to know how and when they will be evaluated, and how these evaluations will be both communicated to them and used for improvement. Adjunct faculty should also know how to choose textbooks, how to receive a complimentary desk copy, and how to ensure that the bookstores have the correct books for their students. All faculty have a great interest in payroll procedures, and adjuncts are no exception. Even though the pay for most adjuncts is a mere pittance (Cox & Leatherman, 2000), these people would still like to know when they will be paid, how they receive their money, what happens when payday falls on a holiday, and so on. A current school calendar is another important courtesy for adjunct faculty to receive, particularly so they are aware of any school holidays as well as the beginning and ending dates of the semester. For faculty who teach off campus, university travel procedural information is a must, including mileage reimbursement rates, procedures for reimbursement, etc. How to obtain a university parking permit and faculty identification card are also important. Finally, contact numbers for the secretaries, department chair, and dean's office should be provided to all

adjunct faculty at the beginning of each semester. It is amazing how much these little things mean to the success of adjunct faculty.

Tip four: Treat adjuncts as colleagues, not subordinates

Persons who serve as adjunct professors hold the same type of terminal degree that professors have. Their qualifications are similar if not superior to those persons in the full time professorate. Thus, there should be no hierarchy, no royal order of who is truly a faculty member and who is "just an adjunct." Effective programs would not exist without either member – full time faculty or adjuncts.

One of the most highly productive things a department can do for its adjunct professors is to treat them as colleagues. To accomplish this, adjuncts should feel welcome on the campus at any time. If possible, they should have a campus mail box where they receive the same information that full time faculty receive. Likewise, a campus email address is a must, again for communication purposes. With these open communication lines, the department and its members can serve as a source of feedback for continuous improvement among adjunct professors, without seeming to do so in a Big Brother modality. Another means of making adjunct faculty feel like faculty colleagues is to invite them to attend faculty meetings. Attending department meetings is an excellent way to keep adjuncts informed of all departmental decisions. When adjuncts cannot attend these meetings, they should be made aware of the agendas, minutes, and outcomes of the meetings. Treating adjuncts as colleagues is a mutually empowering experience – all parties involved share a sense of ownership in the department and its workings. This shared ownership allows for everyone, adjuncts included, to work for the common good of the program and its students.

Tip five: Encourage and support the work of adjuncts.

Encouraging adjuncts is closely related to the idea of treating these highly qualified experts as colleagues. Encouragement and support may come in the form of verbal communication, electronic messages, or even a simple thank you card. Asking adjunct professors for their input and their suggestions, and then using these ideas, is another form of encouragement. Taking the time to sit down with these persons to answer their questions, keep them involved, and make them aware of the goings on of the department can greatly enhance their effectiveness. Offering detailed explanations of course evaluations and overall faculty evaluations is another means of encouraging adjunct professors.

Tip six: Communicate expectations of learner outcomes.

Most educational leadership departments are now driven by standards, whether they be national, state, or programmatic. While adjuncts, namely those who are full time practitioners in the field, may be aware of standards that govern public K-12 schools, they are often unaware of the standards governing leadership preparation programs. For example, many university educator preparation programs must also comply with the standards set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, better known as NCATE. The Interstate Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also maintains a rigorous set of national standards, mandated by 24 states. These standards, which are similar to the NCATE standards described above, have been in place since the early 1990s and were sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers. Persons who are not heavily involved with the university-based preparation program, however, would

likely be unaware that these standards even exist, much less be familiar with what the standards are and how they should be met.

Likewise, adjunct faculty may not be familiar with the certification requirements for students seeking principal or superintendent certificates. State and national accountability systems for university level programs are also likely to be unfamiliar territory for adjunct faculty. In order to make adjunct professors as effective as possible, leadership preparation programs must make these persons aware of the standards and accountability procedures that govern their programs. Otherwise, important components such as field-based activities or authentic assessment measures may not be included in areas of the program that are taught primarily by adjuncts. When this happens, the blame must fall on the preparation program, not the adjunct professor. To successfully meet state or national standards, all stakeholders must be aware of the expectations for meeting those standards. Adjuncts are certainly an important group of stakeholders.

Feedback from Effective Adjuncts

As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrated earlier, adjunct professors, even in an already successful program, can enhance the effectiveness of educational leadership programs. The benefits, however, are mutual. One highly successful adjunct professor explains his feelings about being an adjunct:

> I appreciate the direction given in terms of expectations of learner outcomes. The full time faculty members are well informed on SHSU and departmental expectations, as well as the relationship of each course to certification requirements. In this regard, the faculty has been very helpful in assisting me with course objectives and thereby ensuring the target areas of each course are

> addressed. Please continue to assist and offer feedback for continued improvement. (Webb, 2003)

Other adjunct faculty offer similar comments. Regarding the type of support needed to be an adjunct professor, one practicing superintendent stated, "I think the full time faculty is very supportive. If I have any questions, I just have to email or call and I have an answer. I feel that it is a great partnership" (Ritter, 2003). Another adjunct professor whose feedback shaped most of the tips for this paper commented, "I do feel truly honored to be a part of the SHSU faculty" (Johnson, 2003). The key to this statement is that he does indeed feel as though he is a part of the faculty. And in turn, this adjunct offers a superb education to our leadership students. It is truly a win-win situation for all those involved.

Clearly adjunct professors are an important component of today's educational leadership programs. However, the use of adjunct professors does not have to be a detriment to the department or to the quality of students' education. Rather, adjunct professors can make an educational leadership program even more effective and take it to a higher level of quality. These experts offer a valuable resource to leadership programs, and the responsibility of effectively using adjunct professors now lays squarely on the shoulders of administrator preparation programs.

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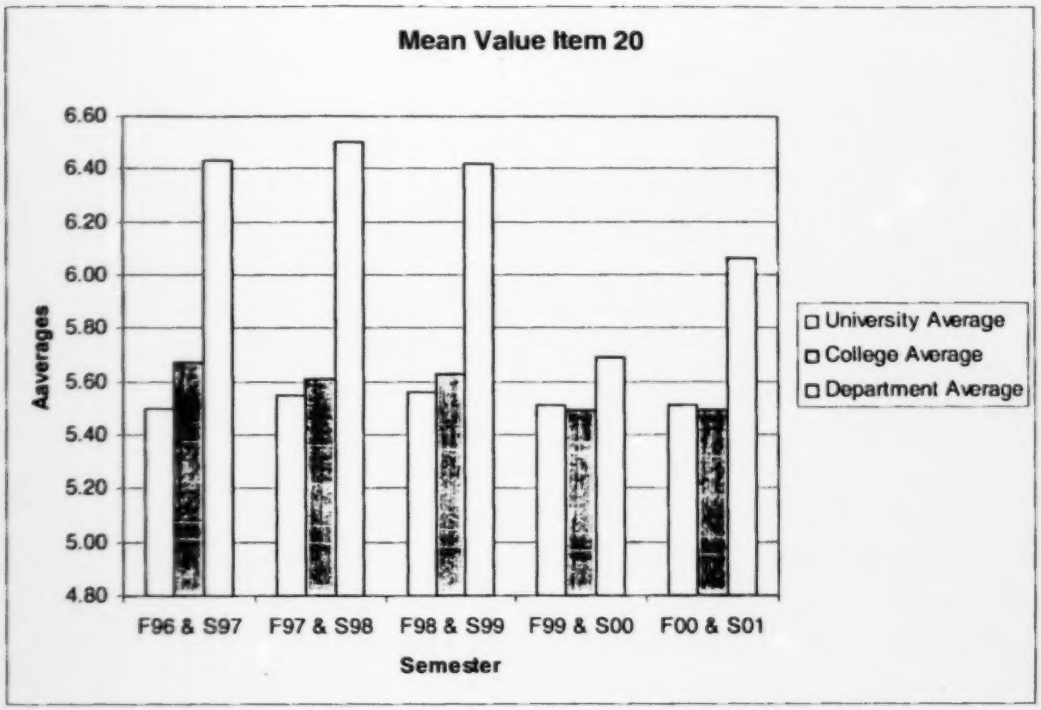

Figure 1.

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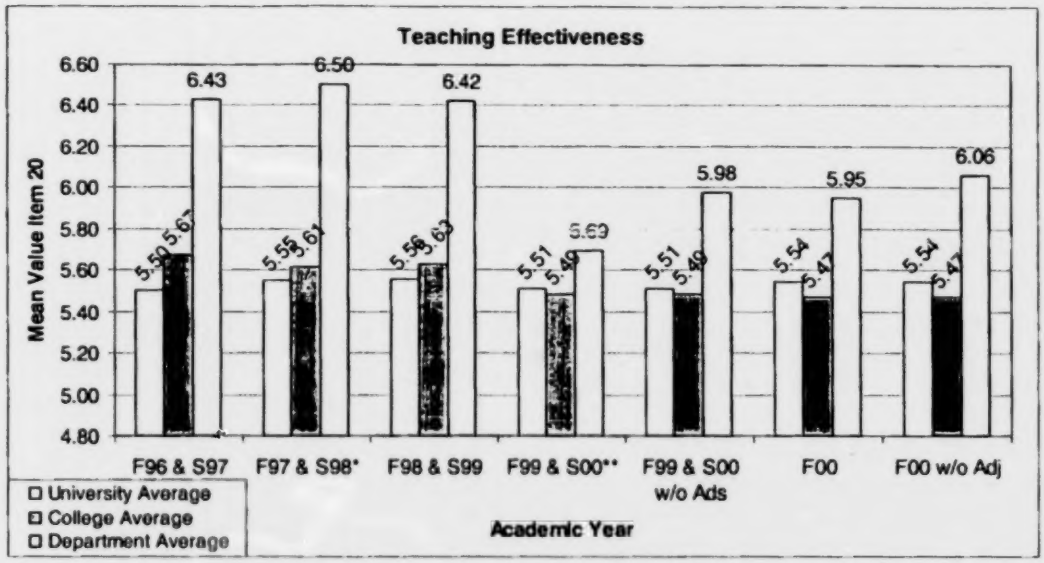

Figure 2.

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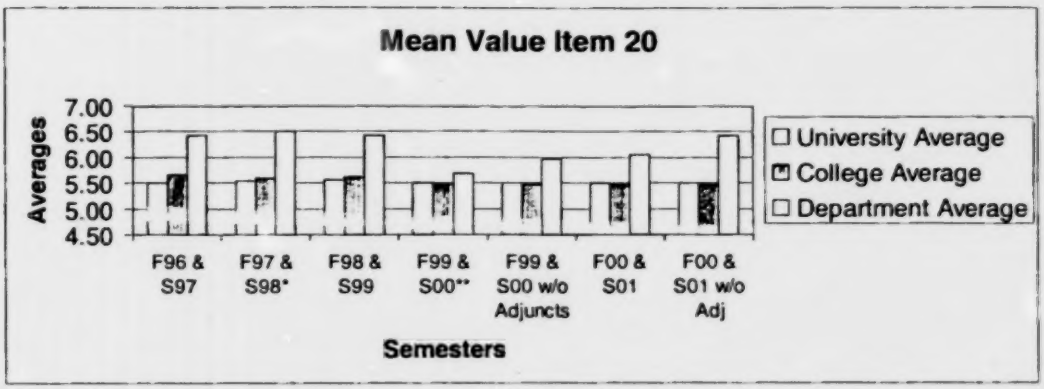

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